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ATONEMENT IN NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS.

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IV. ATONEMENT BY SUBSTITUTION.

48. AT various points in this discussion of atonement attention has been called to substitutionary practices. The giving of life is required to "reconcile" god and man. The parties concerned in the transaction, called upon to yield up their own lives to this end, achieve the desired atonement by the presentation of a substitute. This may take the place of the god whose death gives life to his people, or of the nation suffering under divine wrath. Ancient ideas of animal deities mingle with later convictions of sin in the choice of atoning animal substitutions. Much human sacrifice falls under the principle ascribed by Cæsar to the ancient Germans: "Pro vita hominis nisi hominis vita reddatur, non posse aliter deorum immortalium numen placari arbitrantur."¹ Every religion bears witness to these practices, and the difficulty of organizing the mass of instances into some intelligible relations is considerable.

I.

49. The first class to be presented is that in which substitution is made for a divine life whose sacrifice secures atonement on the communion principle already expounded (par. 21 ff.). In Babylonia the festival of the Sakaia commemorated the following custom according to Athenæus. During the five days of the feast a condemned criminal took the place of the king, wore the royal robes, sat upon the throne, issued royal edicts, enjoyed the king's food, drink, and wives, but at the end of the days was removed and crucified.² Thus the king continued to reign, but the end sought by his death was attained. The choice of a criminal reveals perhaps the higher regard for human life. The

¹ CAESAR, *De Bello Gallico*, vi, 16.

² FRAZER, *G. B.*, I, p. 226.

whole ceremonial, thus modified, continued to set forth the significance of the death and resurrection of the king-god "as the only means of perpetuating the divine life unimpaired, being deemed necessary for the salvation of his people and the world."³ Such temporary kings are found in Cambodia, in Siam, and in upper Egypt, and their divine-human character is not indistinctly revealed. Macdonald cites a similar divine substitutionary sacrifice in Gomba.⁴

50. An important feature of this conception is that often the person substituted for the divine king is a blood-relative, who thereby may be regarded as capable of securing benefits equal to those which accrue from the death of the king himself. The king's son would accordingly most acceptably fill the place of his father, and among the Semitic peoples seems to have sometimes been the substitute. A famous tale of Phœnicia, which Eusebius quotes from Philo Byblios, tells how "Cronus, whom the Phœnicians call El, having, whilst he ruled over that people, begotten an only son, thence entitled Jeud⁵ (it being to this day usual with the Phœnicians so to denominate an only son), had, when the nation was endangered from a most perilous war, after dressing up his son in the emblems of royalty, offered him up as a sacrifice on an altar especially prepared for the purpose."⁶ Here the king is a god and his son the divine-human substitute. The narrative recalls inevitably the action of the king of Moab described in 2 Kings 3:27, and it is not impossible that the same idea lingered in that act.

51. It is not improbable that firstborn children were in the tribal stage regarded as possessing the divine element in a pre-eminent degree, and therefore most proper subjects for the communion atonement. To sacrifice the firstborn was to commune in the kin life at its purest and strongest source. The gift view of sacrifice which came in with property rights changed all this, making the firstborn the property of the god who was willing to accept for him the substitute of a sheep or other

³ FRAZER, *G. B.*, I, p. 228. ⁴ *Religion and Myth*, p. 76. ⁵ Probably for *Jedud*.

⁶ EUSEBIUS, *Praep. Evang.*, I, 10, 29 ff., translated in MAGEE, *Dissertations*, etc., I, pp. 373 f.

sacrificial animal.⁷ But in Central America the old idea still remained, and the father there became the substitute for the firstborn, fasting, or letting blood from his own arm, in atonement for his child's life. In some cases there is a curious reversal of ideas, whereby an animal to be sacrificed substitutionarily is represented as a human being, clothed as such and called "daughter."⁸

52. A series of examples illustrates the substitutionary identification of the worshiper with the god. The old Egyptian religion accomplished the oneness of Osiris and the individual by a kind of magical ritual whereby the suppliant was called by the god's name. Prayers and hymns of the Book of the Dead are all indited in this fashion for the human Osiris. But the commonest method was the use of the skin of the sacrificial animal. Resting upon or gathering about him this skin, the worshiper unites himself thus with the deity, presents himself before the god in the guise of his own sacred animal, and thus identifies himself with the divine being. In the Roman Luperalia, where goats were sacrificed, the sacrificers, smeared with the blood and clad in the goatskins, took a course around the city, striking with thongs of the skin all whom they met. The most satisfactory explanation of this is the view which takes it "as one of the many well-known *piacula* in which the worshiper wears the skin of a very holy victim, thereby entering sacramentally into the very nature of the god to whom the victim is sacrificed."⁹ The god reappears in those who are clad in his sacred garment, which is to them indeed "a robe of righteousness."¹⁰

II.

53. In the old clan and tribal life out of which ancient nations sprang representative or substitutionary atonement was indispensable. In the annual *piaculum* in the blood and body of the victim the god died and lived again in and for his people. As time went on there grew out of this the various mythical

⁷ W. R. SMITH, *Rel. Sem.*², pp. 464 f.

⁸ In the Brauronian ceremonial; cf. FARNELL, *Cults of the Greek States*, II, p. 441.

⁹ FOWLER, *Roman Festivals*, pp. 317 f.

¹⁰ W. R. SMITH, *Rel. Sem.*², p. 438.

recollections of great divine heroes of the past whose death secured redemption. Such were Osiris in Egypt, Dionysus in Greece, Attis and Adonis in western Asia. No sense of sin associated itself with the contemplation of these gods; in the case of the two latter the ritual commemorated their yearly death and resurrection in a public festival of a purely orgiastic character. In the Eddic poem "Hava-mal" the god Woden says: "I mind me hanging on the gallows-tree nine whole nights, wounded with the spear offered to Woden, myself to myself; on the tree whose roots no man knoweth. They gave me no loaf; they held no horn to me. I peered down, I caught the mysteries up with a cry, then I fell back [descended]. I learnt nine songs of might from Balethorn's son, Bestla's father, and I got the draught of the precious mead, blent with Odreari [Inspiration]. Then I became fruitful and wise, and waxed great and flourished; word followed fast on word with me, and work followed fast on work with me."¹¹ This curious passage suggests divine self-immolation for the attainment of power to accomplish the work of salvation, and hence may be illustrative of the present point.

54. In close connection are the instances of human kings or leaders who atone for their people. Such was the Babylonian king who by his strict observance of the divine laws insured the welfare of the nation.¹² The emperor of China likewise represents his people in the sight of heaven and is held responsible by them for fulfilling the divine will.¹³ It is often difficult to distinguish in these cases whether the king is regarded as a divine personage or is really a surrogate for others. So, for example, King Doomwald was offered in sacrifice to the gods by his Swedish subjects in a time of terrible famine; the first year they sacrificed oxen; the second year the offerings were human beings; the third year the king himself was devoted. "It was a fearful deed," says the chronicler, "when the sword

¹¹ Hava-mal, 2-5; translated in VIGFUSSON AND POWELL, *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, I, pp. 24 f.

¹² JASTROW, *Religion of Babyl. and Assyria*, p. 378.

¹³ MENZIES, *History of Religion*, p. 110.

bearers reddened the altars with their lord's blood."¹⁴ The Roman custom called *devotio*¹⁵ invited the citizen, usually the most distinguished, to offer himself on behalf of the state at a time when unusual calamities seemed to attest the divine anger, and the favor of the gods must be secured by a special offering. Thus, when an abyss opened in the Roman Forum and the gods required that what constituted the greatest strength of Rome should be offered, "Marcus Curtius, a youth distinguished in war, reproved them for hesitating whether there was any greater Roman god than arms and valor—then, mounted on a horse splendidly harnessed, he plunged fully armed into the opening." Two members of the Decian family similarly devoted themselves in critical moments of war and thus gained the victory for Rome, voluntarily gathering all threatenings and dangers from gods above and below upon their own heads.¹⁶

55. That the individual could take the place of the collective life, whether of clan or nation, therefore, was a widely accepted principle of ancient religion. The substitution of the animal for the man along with the preservation of the same representative character of the sacrifice is equally attested. Thus in Greece Pausanias adduces instances such as that of Potniæ, where for a crime of the inhabitants against Dionysus the yearly offering of a boy in the flower of his youth had been demanded, which was afterward changed to that of a goat.¹⁷ A similar substitution was made on the occasion of the sacrifice of Iphigenia by Agamemnon; the maiden disappeared and a goat¹⁸ took her place, according to the legend. Plutarch states that in Egypt the ox intended for sacrifice was sealed with a signet which had stamped on it the figure of a man on his knees with a knife at his throat.¹⁹ "In fact, ancient writers supposed that primarily men were sacrificed, but were gradually replaced by animals, 'the bodies of which they presented as offerings substituted for their own bodies.'"²⁰

¹⁴ VIGFUSSON AND POWELL, *C. P. B.*, I, p. 409.

¹⁷ *Pausanias*, ix, 8.

¹⁵ MOMMSEN, *History of Rome*, I, chap. xii.

¹⁸ In some legends a stag.

¹⁶ *Livy*, vii, 6; viii, 9; x, 28.

¹⁹ *De Iside et Osiride*, chap. xxxi.

²⁰ KALISCH, *Com. on Leviticus*, I, p. 298, quoting from Theophrastus; many other instances of substitution of animals are mentioned by Kalisch, pp. 345 f.

56. This belief of the classical writers is interesting and conclusive as to their own recognition of the principle of substitution. It is not, however, in all probability the true explanation of the facts, even when its philosophy is so persuasively expounded by a modern writer in the following words: "Never, then, in himself—never by means of his own life—could man's acknowledgment that life was forfeited rightly be carried out. It must needs be in another. And the same reason exists against making that other some fellow-man. His life, too, is a sacred thing—is itself an end. It could not, therefore, be used as this means to some other end. . . . It remained that, if sacrifice was to be, the sphere of animal life must be that of which it should take possession, and in which it must move; the life of animals being the nearest akin to, and the noblest after, man, and therefore fitter than any meaner for the setting forth of his oblation of himself."²¹ This notion arose, as W. Robertson Smith justly observes, "by a false inference from traditional forms of ritual that had ceased to be understood." These forms were based on the kinship of animals and men whereby the animal was regarded as divine. When this idea had passed away before the advance of settled life and the notions of property, the old ceremonial attending the death of the divine animal was kept up, but with the false explanation, natural enough in the circumstances, "that at the altar the victim took the place of a man."²² Such was the explanation of the cult of Brauron by the ancients, of which Farnell says that, "if human life was ever offered up in the Brauronian rite, it would be probably truer to say, so to speak, that Iphigenia was a substitute for the doe than that the doe was a substitute for Iphigenia."²³

III.

57. While our attention has been fixed thus far upon the facts and phases of substitution, it has not been possible to avoid referring to the specific purposes contemplated by such atonement. In general, of course, these are the same as would have

²¹ TRENCH, *Christ the Desire of All Nations*, Lect. IV, pp. 182 f.

²² W. R. SMITH, *Rel. Sem.*, p. 365.

²³ *Cults of the Greek States*, II, p. 441.

been attained by the original sacrifice, and it is instructive to give special consideration to the methods and ends as modified by the substitutionary element. First may be noted the substitute bearing pain. The significance of suffering as an atonement has already been discussed (par. 11). But if to furnish an adequate amount of suffering be regarded as indispensable, this may as well be secured from a substitute as from the guilty ones. Thus in American religions slaves and captives dedicated to the gods were tortured. Brinton, expounding this theory of the efficacy of suffering, and noting that it is a secondary consideration what or who suffers, or in what manner he or it suffers, declares that this doctrine is the germ of *vicarious* sacrifice.²⁴ Baring-Gould states the argument thus: "I have broken a law of God. God exacts pain as a consequence of such a breach. I will therefore slay this lamb, and its suffering shall make the atonement requisite."²⁵

58. The extension of this conception, or rather the more fundamental notion out of which it grows, is that one can transfer to another the burdens under which he suffers. This is a very common savage idea, and gives rise to various devices for shuffling off troubles on a variety of things or persons, which thereupon are removed out of sight in various ways. The fullest treatment of this topic is given by Frazer in *The Golden Bough*,²⁶ and one need but select the most interesting among his many citations of such customs. First, the divine king becomes the bearer of evils. Such was the Mamurius Veturius (old Mars) of Rome, who every year on March 24 was beaten with rods and driven out of the city. The citizens of Massilia, when plague came upon their city, took a man—one who offered himself for the purpose—maintained him a year at the public expense on pure and choice food, and at the end of the year dressed him in sacred garments, decked him with holy branches, led him through the city with prayers that all the evils of the community might fall upon his head, and cast him out. Thus are to be explained two attitudes often observable when the king-god was sacrificed.

²⁴ *The Religious Sentiment*, pp. 221 f.

²⁵ *Origin and Develop. of Rel. Belief*, I, pp. 387 f.

²⁶ Vol. II, pp. 148-217.

The sacrifice is performed with signs of intense grief; the slain god is thereupon treated with contumely, looked upon with aversion, beaten, hurried out of sight. The one attitude is in view of his divine character; the other regards him as the representative bearer of the evils of the community. The choice of criminals as these substitutes, of which there are various examples, is perhaps explicable from this point of view. In them the verisimilitude is complete on one side—they are themselves guilty, and thus may be made to bear the common sin and by death pay the penalty for all. In the same way the Greek communities used to maintain a corps of degraded and useless beings, deformed persons, or slaves, to serve the purpose of atonement in case of a crisis in public life which betokened divine wrath. The example of the Sakaia in Babylon (par. 49) suggests the probability that these were regarded as divine representatives or substitutes, and as such were sacrificed. An interesting combination of the two ideas is given in a detail of the Brahmanic Asvamedha sacrifice. The sacrificer is purged of guilt by an oblation made on the bald head of an ugly-looking Brahman purchased for a thousand cows, who stands in the river, where the water flows into his mouth. This looks like a sacrificial death, and so Professor Weber holds. Professor Eggeling, however, notes that after the oblation “they drive the man out, thinking that the guilt of the village outcasts is (thereby) driven out.” It is added that, when the sacrificer has stepped out of the water, evil-doers enter (to bathe in the water) without having performed any (other) rites, and are said to be purified.²⁷

59. Second, there is the custom of voluntarily accepting the burden of another's sins. “In Travancore, when a Rajah is dangerously ill and his life is despaired of, a holy Brahman is brought, who closely embraces the king and says: ‘O king! I undertake to bear all of your sins and diseases.’ Then the sin-bearer is sent away from the country and never allowed to return.” In various lands persons used to be hired to eat a “sin-loaf” which had been passed over the body of a dead man. Thereby they assumed all his sins, and he was free from them.

²⁷ EGGEING, *Satapatha Brahmana*, Book V, Int., xxxix f. (S. B. E., Vol. 44).

They were called "sin-eaters." Such customs have been observed in India and Turkestan, as well as in Great Britain.

60. Third, sins are transferred to an animal, which is then driven out or slain and its body removed, often by burial or fire. The Hebrew "scapegoat" is a familiar example. Goats are employed for the carrying away of evils in India; elsewhere the llama, the buffalo, the cock, the pig, the dog, and the horse. Sometimes, as seems to be the case with the "scapegoat," the animal is divine. In such cases it is sacrificed as a sin-bearer; thus in India the cow, in Egypt the bull, and possibly the turtle among the Zunis.

IV.

61. In the substitutionary atonement for sin we have reached about the farthest remove from the early communion idea. Whereas there the atonement was made by the god offered up to renew divine life in the community, here "the sin of the community" is "concentrated on the victim, and its death" is "accepted as a sacrifice to divine justice." There communion in the body and blood of the god, or, at least, with him in a festal meal, was the acceptable means of enjoying divine fellowship; here the offering is intensely holy, and therefore dangerous or defiling, and cannot be touched by the worshiper who is seeking expiation—not to speak of eating it, which was sometimes forbidden even to the priest.²⁸ Yet even in these wide differences it is remarkable how the old ideas lingered, being preserved by the ritual, and how thereby it is possible to trace the history of the atoning ideas from their early content to their latest transformations. Yet, what is traceable as history by us was not by any means so intelligible to the ancients at particular periods in its development, and the persistence of ancient forms when their content had disappeared was prone to produce a confusion of ideas and a want of adjustment of form to content, things which made the later sacrificial structure so clumsy and inadequate as to draw down the ridicule of ancient skeptics and to render it an easy mark for Christian apologists.

62. It cannot be denied, however, that the forms, in spite of

²⁸ W. R. SMITH, *Rel. Sem.*², pp. 350 f.

their inadequacy, were produced out of actual concrete situations of human need and aspiration, and exercised an immense influence for good upon ancient life. Renan's remark²⁹ that "sacrifice is the oldest and most serious error . . . among those bequeathed to us by the state of folly which humanity passed through in its infancy," is the clever *bon mot* of that most erratic and untrustworthy of writers, which, if true, would give the lie to his own evolutionary philosophy. The failure of sacrifice lay in the material outlook which only with difficulty could be even imperfectly adjusted to the new moral ideal. As we have seen, men sought to bring about this adjustment, and succeeded in making sacrifice contribute fruitfully to moral progress. It was interpreted newly so as to emphasize justice and self-restraint, intensify the sense of ill desert, and seek relief for it in atoning rites, call out the spirit of renunciation and self-abnegation, while bearing along the eternal truth, wrapped indeed in material forms, that atonement consists in union with God. Its social basis in the solidarity of the clan and the nation, while not giving sufficient consideration to the individual, still embodied a permanent fact which is not yet outgrown. If its substitutions were unreal and its ritual materialistic, they at least formed the scaffolding by which humanity reared its more permanent spiritual ideals, and thus it prepared the way for the future as well as supplied the chief element in the religious life of the ancient world. The influence which the stately institutions of the atoning ritual had upon the religion of Israel and upon Christianity will appear in succeeding papers of this series.

²⁹ *Histoire du peuple d'Israel*, I, p. 52.